

NAMI
National Alliance on Mental Illness
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The Arizona Tragedy and Mental Health Care
Statement by Michael J. Fitzpatrick,
Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NAMI is an organization of individuals and families whose lives have been deeply affected by mental illness.

We share the sadness of other Americans over the Tucson, Arizona tragedy and extend our sympathy to the families of the six individuals who died. We pray for the recovery of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords and the 13 other persons who were wounded. Representative Giffords is a NAMI friend who has served as co-chair of the NAMIWalk in Southeast Arizona and has supported our missions of education, support and advocacy. When tragedies involving mental illness occur, it is essential to understand the nature of mental illness—and to find out what went wrong.

The U.S. Surgeon General has reported that the likelihood of violence from people with mental illness is low. In fact, “the overall contribution of mental disorders to the total level of violence in society is exceptionally small.” Acts of violence are exceptional. They are a sign that something has gone terribly wrong, usually in the mental healthcare system.

Nationwide, the mental health care system is broken. Arizona, like other states, has deeply cut mental health services. Arizona has a broad civil commitment law to require treatment if it is needed; however, the law cannot work if an evaluation is never conducted or mental health services are not available.

In specific cases such as this, authorities and the news media should seek to objectively determine every factor that may have contributed to the tragedy—so that we can act on lessons learned.

- * Was there a diagnosis?
- * What is the full medical history?
- * When were symptoms first noticed?
- * Did family members receive education about mental illness and support?
- * Did the person or family ever seek treatment—only to have it delayed or denied?
- * Was the person seen by mental health professionals? By whom? How often?
- * Was treatment coordinated among different professionals?
- * Was the person prescribed medication? Was it being taken? If not, why not?
- * Was substance abuse involved?
- * What may have triggered the psychiatric crisis?

Jan. 2011

Dear friend of mental health:

Happy 2011! May this year bring many more advances and improvements to the lives of those affected by serious mental illness. NAMI Missoula is committed to this end. We continue to move forward, getting more active in the community and state, and expanding our support group numbers and availability.

Last year your membership dues contributed toward funding local educational programs, publicity and advertising in the Missoulian and three billboards, printed materials, gift packages for Warm Springs residents, and emergency housing for a member in crisis, among other very worthy causes. Thank you so much for being a part of that! You should also be receiving the quarterly magazine, The Advocate, from our national headquarters. If not, contact me for help on that.

Yearly dues breakdown is as follows: Consumer \$5, Single \$20, Family \$30, Friend/Advocate \$50. Inability to pay in full does NOT exclude anyone from membership. And please join us for our educational presentations and/or support groups.

NAMI-Missoula family/friends support group - Thursdays, 10 a.m.- noon. Providence Ctr., Rm. 109, lower level.

NAMI Connection recovery support group - Fridays 12:30 - 2:00 p.m., Missoula Public Library, Small meeting room, lower level.

*****NEW!!!*****

Beginning Feb. 1.

NAMI-Missoula family/friends support group - Tues. EVENINGS, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., Providence Ctr., Rm. 107, lower level.

Watch for notices in the Missoulian for special events and seminars.

Upcoming educational presentation: "Crisis Mental Health Issues from the Perspective of Local Law Enforcement" - Retired Sheriff's Deputy, Don Morman. Thurs., Feb. 3, 11:00 a.m., Providence Ctr., Rm. 109, lower level. Be informed! Again, thank you for your participation in enhancing the lives of the 3 out of 5 Montana families affected by serious mental illness. Our new email address is: nami.missoula@yahoo.com.

For the mind of America,

Mary Morman
 NAMI Missoula, Administrator
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